

Your ECONOMIC STIMULUS CHECK and HOW TO SPEND IT

IF YOU PAID INCOME TAXES IN THE U.S. FOR 2007, you have probably already received your stimulus rebate check, your little part of this administration's Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, and have deposited it in a bank account back home. For taxpayers who filed a 2007 income tax return, the amount of the economic stimulus payment is calculated automatically by the IRS.

For example, if you owed net income tax of \$600, you will receive a \$600 rebate, unless you are someone's dependent, have an income over \$75,000 (\$150,000 for a married couple filing jointly) or do not have a valid Social Security number. "The payment is equal to the taxpayer's net income tax liability, but no more than \$600 for a single person or \$1,200 for a married couple filing a joint return. The minimum payment is \$300 for a single person or \$600 for a married couple filing jointly." To see how the Internal Revenue Service calculates stimulus payments, see <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=179211,00.html>.

THERE MAY STILL BE TIME for Social Security beneficiaries, disabled vets and others who did not file a tax return to submit a 2007 form to receive an economic stimulus payment. To be eligible for a \$300 payment you must have a valid Social Security number, at least \$3,000 in qualifying income and not be a dependent or eligible to be a dependent on someone else's income tax return. This is not automatic. You must take the initiative. For details see <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=179949,00.html>.

IF YOU RECEIVED A STIMULUS REBATE, PRESIDENT BUSH IS NOW EXPECTING YOU TO GO ON A SHOPPING SPREE. But you can fool him! Of course, if you have outstanding dollar IOUs, pay them off. And, if necessary, buy those made-in-Vermont socks and have them sent as a birthday present directly to your cousin. It might stimulate the U.S. economy.

But otherwise, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED DONATING TO THE ORGANIZATIONS OF YOUR CHOICE, WHICH ARE SURELY NOT THOSE THAT THIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD CHOOSE? This might be a real stimulus! You can think about who should get more or less, or simply donate the same amount to several. If you are unfamiliar with U.S. organizations that might suit you and your philosophy of giving, here are a few suggestions, just eight among many.

These are, of course, only my personal choices. I would be interested in hearing about yours. Write me at wertheim@zedat.fu-berlin.de.

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1. **The American Civil Liberties Union** www.aclu.org The ACLU is nonprofit and nonpartisan and has grown from a roomful of civil liberties activists to an organization of more than 500,000 members and supporters. It handles nearly 6,000 court cases annually from its offices in almost every state. The ACLU has maintained the position that civil liberties must be respected, even in times of national emergency.

2. **United for Peace and Justice** www.ufpj.org UFPJ is a coalition of more than 1400 local and national groups throughout the United States who have joined together to protest the immoral and disastrous Iraq War and oppose our government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building. American Voices Abroad Berlin is a member group of UFPJ.

3. **The Southern Poverty Law Center** www.splcenter.org The Southern Poverty Law Center was founded in 1971 as a small civil rights law firm. Today, SPLC is internationally known for its tolerance education programs, its legal victories against white supremacists and its tracking of hate groups.

4. **EMILY's List** www.emilyslist.org EMILY's List members are dedicated to building a progressive America by electing pro-choice Democratic women to office. EMILY's List has a three-pronged strategy for victory: recruit and fund pro-choice Democratic women candidates; help them build and run effective campaigns; and, mobilize women voters to help elect progressive candidates across the nation. EMILY stands for Early Money Is Like Yeast!

5. **J Street** www.jstreet.org There is no actual J Street in Washington, but there should be! (K Street, as you may remember, is the street of lobbyists.) The organization called J Street was founded in 2008 to support a new direction for American policy in the Middle East as well as a broad public and policy debate about the U.S. role in the region. J Street supports diplomatic solutions over military ones, including in Iran; multilateral over unilateral approaches to conflict resolution; and dialogue over confrontation with a wide range of countries and actors when conflicts do arise. J Street will advocate forcefully in the policy process, in Congress, in the media, and in the Jewish community to make sure public officials and community leaders clearly see the depth and breadth of support for our views on Middle East policy among voters and supporters in their states and districts.

6. **TruthOut** www.truthout.org TruthOut is a full-service news agency, started in direct response to the mainstream media's coverage of the 2000 election, dedicated to establishing a powerful, stable voice for independent journalism. The core of its mission is educational, as it believes the biggest impediment to responsible decision-making is a lack of information. It provides citizens with reader-supported news instead of advertiser-supported news. Its direction is one of social progress, as it attempts to shed light on issues of vital interest to the community such as health care, the environment, international relations and human rights.

TruthOut scours the global news media for the most important stories it can find. It covers national issues concerning foreign policy, the war in Iraq, ethics in government, voter rights, human rights and the judiciary. It features unique coverage of health, energy, environmental, labor and women's issues. It alerts its readers to pivotal opinion pieces appearing in major newspapers and journals and emails free newsletters to its subscribers featuring the day's top stories.

7. **National Public Radio** www.npr.org/worldwide/berlin NPR Berlin broadcasts in Berlin at 104.1 FM (UKW). NPR is a privately supported, not-for-profit membership organization. You can see the station's weekly program schedule for Berlin at: <http://www.npr.org/worldwide/nprworldwide.html>

There does not seem to be a way to donate to NPR Berlin directly. But if you are a fan of a particular program (for example, The Diane Rehm Show – WAMU or Fresh Air with Terry Gross – WHYI), what about donating to that station. Or donate to the station that broadcasts in your hometown.

8. **Agustin Aguayo Defense** www.aguayodefense.org Agustin Aguayo is the conscientious objector who received the Stuttgarter Friedenspreis awarded by the AnStifter. Some of you may have met Augie at an American Voices Abroad Berlin reception held in his honor at Pam Selwyn's house last year.

Augie writes that he and his wife Helga are devoting their time "to young people who are thinking about enlisting and those targeted by military recruiters. This year we are determined to see at least 10,000 teenagers and young adults and provide them with the information that will help them make informed decisions. (We have seen nearly 5,000 this year already — YOU can help us reach our goal of 10,000!) Our mission is to provide young people with an alternative and realistic point of view about military enlistment, and to show them the power of living with conscience. Our message helps young people understand that they don't have to join the military to learn valuable skills, find adventure, pay for college, or serve others."